DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 597 CS 207 575

TITLE	Statement of Censorship and Professional Guidelines.
INSTITUTION	National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, Ill.
PUB DATE	82
NOTE	3p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Freedom; *Censorship; Curriculum Development; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Curriculum; *Evaluation Criteria; Guidelines; *Instructional Materials; *Language Arts
IDENTIFIERS	Fact Sheets; National Council of Teachers of English; PF Project; *Professional Guidelines

ABSTRACT

Designed for language arts teachers, the fact sheet is arranged into four short parts. Part 1 provides a brief statement by the National Council of Teachers of English regarding its position on censorship. Part 2 briefly describes the distinction between censorship and professional guidelines. Part 3 gives five examples of censorship and five examples of professional guidelines, to illustrate the distinction between the two. The final part lists six practical suggestions for writing professional guidelines. (LH)

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STATEMENT OF CENSORSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL GUIDELINES

I. Statement

Teachers of English language arts must make daily decisions about materials and methods of instruction, choosing from increasingly broad and varied alternatives in order to serve students who are themselves increasingly diverse, both linguistically and culturally. Guidelines help teachers of English language arts to make those decisions NCTE advocates and supports guidelines that help teachers avoid censorship. NCTE opposes censorship wherever it appears.

II. Distinctions between Censorship and Professional Guidelines

Censorship and guidelines sometimes appear similar because both involve selection from myriad alternatives. However, censorship and professional guidelines may be distinguished one from the other. Whereas the goal of censorship is to remove, eliminate or bar particular materials and methods, the goal of professional guidelines is to provide criteria for selection of materials and methods.

III. Censorship Distinguished from Professional Guidelines: Examples

Examples of Censorship	Examples of Professional Guidelines
1. **Exclude Specific Materials or Methods** *Example:* Eliminate books with unhappy endings.	1. **Include Specific Materials or Methods** *Example:* Include some books with unhappy endings to give a varied view of life.
2. **Are Essentially Negative** *Example:* Review your classroom library and eliminate books that include stereotypes.	2. **Are Essentially Affirmative** *Example:* Review your classroom library. If necessary, add books that portray groups in nonstereotypical ways.
3. **Intend to Control** *Example:* Do not accept *policeman.* Insist that students say and write *police officer.*	3. **Intend to Advise** *Example:* Encourage such nonlimiting alternatives for *policeman* as *police officer, officer of the law* or *law enforcer.*
4. **Seek to Indoctrinate, to Limit Access to Ideas and Information** *Example:* Drug abuse is a menace to students. Eliminate all books that portray drug abuse.	4. **Seek to Educate, to Increase Access to Ideas and Information** *Example:* Include at appropriate grade levels books that will help students understand the personal and social consequences of drug abuse.
5. **Look at Parts of a Work in Isolation** *Example:* Remove this book. The language includes profanity.	5. **See the Relationship of Parts to Each Other and to a Work as a Whole** *Example:* Determine whether the profanity is integral to portrayal of character and development of theme in the book.

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IV. Practical Suggestions for Writing Professional Guidelines

Although the primary concern here is the distinction between censorial and advisory statements, other matters must be considered in the actual writing of guidelines. Writers need to:

1. *Respect the role of the English language arts teacher as a professional with broad knowledge of language, literature and cultural traditions.*

2. *Identify clearly the events and concerns that led to development of the particular set of guidelines.*

   This information might help the English language arts teacher in one school setting (rural, independent, suburban or urban) to understand the usefulness of guidelines developed elsewhere.

3. *Specify the professional objectives the guidelines are expected to reach.*

   Guidelines are less likely to have censorial effects if their content is closely linked to the purposes of English language arts instruction, to the function and philosophy of the school, to the particular student population, and to the aims of the curriculum as a whole.

4. *Write in plain English, providing clear, current definitions of professional terms as needed.*

5. *Respect the concerns and convictions of both external critics and professional colleagues who have opposing ideas about either principles or practices.*

   Guidelines are abstractions, and honest differences of opinion will exist about translating abstractions into concrete teaching and selection of materials.

6. *Build in procedures for review and revision.*

   Guidelines should make clear the date of adoption and the sponsoring group(s) and should provide for periodic review and revision. The teaching community is committed to continued research and study and to the dissemination of insights that prove to be valid and useful.

—Approved by the NCTE Board of Directors, 1982.